

CONNECT



Northern
Ireland
Hospice

DECEMBER 2025

Craig Gilroy
joins Team
Hospice!





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Have you got a story to share?



We would love to include your stories and photos in the next edition of 'Connect'. Whether it's a touching moment, a fundraising highlight, or a simple message of thanks, we'd love to hear from you!

Please contact communications@nihospice.org

Welcome from the Chief Executive



As we come to the end of another year, I'm proud to share this edition with you - a celebration of the extraordinary difference Northern Ireland Hospice has made, and the incredible people who make it possible.

Every story within these pages reflects your kindness, generosity, and belief in the power of compassionate, specialist palliative care. Each year, we care for over 4,000 babies, children, and adults - not only in our Adult and Children's Inpatient Units, but also in homes and communities right across Northern Ireland. In fact, the majority of our patients are supported by our specialist teams in the place they feel most comfortable - their own homes.

The need for our care continues to grow, and the complexity of the conditions we see is increasing. As our Health Service faces mounting pressures, the care and support provided by Northern Ireland Hospice have never been more vital.

At the heart of everything we do is a team of highly skilled professionals providing expert clinical care, comfort, and dignity for those living with life-limiting illness. Our support extends far beyond medical treatment - encompassing emotional, spiritual, and practical care for patients and their families, wherever and whenever they need us most.

Despite the remarkable generosity of the public, we continue to face serious funding challenges. The long-promised government commitment to fund 50% of our services has yet to be fulfilled, leaving us reliant on the generosity of the communities we serve to help meet our **£20 million annual costs**. Operating within a challenging inflationary environment makes this even more difficult. Yet our determination remains steadfast - and with your continued support, we will maintain the essential services that so many depend upon.

At Northern Ireland Hospice, we are here for you - in your homes, in your communities, and when you need us most. Now, we ask you to continue being here for us, so together we can ensure that no one faces life-limiting illness without dignity, comfort, and compassion.

Thank you for standing with us throughout 2025. Your support sustains everything we do. On behalf of everyone at Northern Ireland Hospice, I wish you and your loved ones a peaceful Christmas and a New Year filled with hope and good health.

Trevor McCartney,
NI Hospice Chief Executive



A Year in Hospice



As 2025 draws to a close, we look back on a year full of milestones, community events, and achievements that have helped us support families across Northern Ireland. Here is a snapshot of some of the highlights from each month.

January

Eco Schools programme at Park Lodge inspires young minds to care for the environment.



February

NI Health Committee visits, recognising the importance of specialist palliative care.



March

Carrickfergus Shop opens. Little Cub art project brings creativity to our Children's Hospice. CO3 Awards celebrate outstanding community champions.



May

Dying Matters Week raises awareness across communities. Ballymena Shop opens, and we shine at the Balmoral Show.



April

Belfast Giants visit Children's Hospice. Staff mark long service milestones with pride.



June

Volunteers' Week honours our amazing teams. Hospice Hockey and Children's Hospice Week bring energy and joy. Jenny Donnan awarded MBE for exceptional contribution.

July

Belfast Pride celebrates diversity and inclusion. Volunteer Judy Turner receives the Order of Mercy Award. Winnie the therapy dog stars in UTV's 'Dogs with Jobs'.



August

One Big Walk unites supporters across Northern Ireland, raising vital funds for families in need.



September

Palliative Care Week highlights our care services. Dragon Boat Race excites communities. Cregagh Road Shop opens its doors.



October

Annual AGM gathers to reflect and plan for the future. We also welcomed Blue Lights star Nathan Braniff, who spent time meeting staff and patients and learning more about Hospice care.



November

World Kindness Day and Kindness Counts encourage acts of compassion. Children's Grief Awareness Week and Tesco Bucket Collection make a difference in local communities.



December

Festive 5k spreads Christmas cheer. Carol Service and Lights to Remember honour loved ones and celebrate the season of hope.



Living for Today, Planning for Tomorrow



This year's Palliative Care Week was themed as 'Living for Today, Planning for Tomorrow' to inspire action – in how we support, talk about, and plan for care.

The week's events started at the MAC in Belfast with a screening of 'Cicely and David', a play about the founder of the modern Hospice movement, Dame Cicely Saunders.

With a welcome address by Philip McGuigan MLA, Chair of the Health Committee, the drama was followed by an informative and thought-provoking panel discussion on palliative care. The play's writer David Clark was joined on the panel

by, among others, NI Hospice's CEO Trevor McCartney, Voices4Care member Christine Campbell, and Paul Clark MBE, who MC-ed proceedings.

Palliative Care Week aims to raise awareness of the vital role specialised care and support plays in the lives of people with serious illness. People like Paul Linden, whose beloved wife Maoliosa told us how NI Hospice's specialist palliative care made such a difference to Paul's wellbeing and dignity.

"Paul was just incredible," said Maoliosa. "He was just the nicest person. Never complained. Just got on with life.



"Paul was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. It was devastating for the family. When it was suggested that we speak to a palliative care doctor, that was the first acceptance, 'This is palliative care now, not curative.'

"The Hospice nurse was our first port of call for everything in the last six weeks of Paul's life. Anything that went wrong, anything we weren't happy with – it was the Hospice nurse that we contacted, and she was brilliant."

Maoliosa soon realised she could no longer care for him at home, for his dignity and her own wellbeing: *"Paul had wanted to die at home, so we hadn't really thought about Hospice. But when a Hospice bed became available it was like manna from heaven. From we went in through the door of the Hospice, it was like a peace descended on us. Paul too. Paul's shoulders relaxed. He just knew this is the place to be.*

"One of the nurses said, 'You go from being his carer to being his wife again, and the children go from caring for him to being children.' And he was as happy as he could have been under the circumstances. And so were we.

"One day I was exhausted and said to the nurses 'I'm going to get into bed beside him.' And they moved him across to let me get in bed beside him. I had a glass of wine with them. It was lovely. And I was asleep beside him when he died. We were all there together.

"We honestly couldn't have asked for a better death."





Honouring Those We Hold in Our Hearts

Each year, as the festive season approaches, Northern Ireland Hospice invites families and communities to come together to remember loved ones who are no longer with us. The 2025 Lights to Remember appeal and remembrance service is a poignant celebration of lives lived, and a way to support vital Hospice care across the region.

The Lights to Remember appeal allows people from across Northern Ireland to dedicate a light on the Hospice Christmas tree in memory of someone special. Every light represents a life remembered and helps fund the Hospice's specialist palliative care services, ensuring families continue to receive compassionate care when they need it most.

This year's service takes place on Thursday 18th December at 7pm at Dominican College, Fortwilliam, Belfast, followed by a moving candlelight procession to Somerton House, the Adult In-Patient Unit on Belfast's Somerton Road. The evening offers a quiet moment of reflection, a chance for the community to unite in remembrance, and an opportunity to celebrate the lives of those who have touched us deeply.

At the heart of the service this year is Sarah Hall and her young children, Meabh, Ethan and Jessica. Sarah's husband, Stuart, sadly passed away in Hospice care in October 2022. They will light the first candle of remembrance, symbolising the love and memories that continue to shine even in the absence of those we miss.

Following the service, Sarah and her family will join NI Hospice President Paul Clark to officially switch on the Christmas lights at Somerton House. The tree will glow with lights dedicated by the community, forming a beautiful tribute to all those no longer with us, and a reminder of the hope, care and connection that the Hospice brings to families throughout Northern Ireland.

The Lights to Remember appeal is more than a fundraising initiative; it is a way for communities to come together, to share memories, and to honour the lives of loved ones in a meaningful and heartfelt way. Each light represents not only someone remembered but also the continuing support of families at a time when it matters most.

This festive season, NI Hospice invites everyone to take part, to dedicate a light, and to be part of a community that remembers, celebrates, and brings hope to families across Northern Ireland.

Join us for our
Lights to Remember Service



Dominican College
Fortwilliam, Belfast

Thursday 18th December, 7pm



Making waves for a cause! Dragon Boat Race 2025!



What an incredible weekend in September! 39 teams came together for our much-loved annual Dragon Boat Race, bringing energy, teamwork, and plenty of laughs - all while raising vital funds for Northern Ireland Hospice.

Friday was picture-perfect, with the sun shining as teams paddled, raced, and cheered each other on. Saturday threw a few stormy skies our way, but nothing could dampen the amazing energy, determination, and camaraderie on the water. From first-time paddlers to seasoned pros, everyone threw themselves into the challenge with smiles and team spirit that kept the weekend buzzing!

A big shout-out to Exegy, and Martin and Hamilton, who showed off their teamwork and paddling skills to claim our Dragon Boat Trophies.

We also want to give a huge shout-out to our generous sponsors, Domino's Pizza, for helping make the event a success, and to our friends at Rapid Relief for providing amazing food for all the teams!

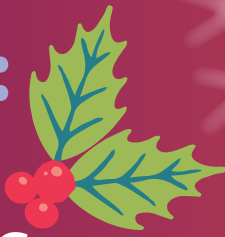
To everyone who joined in - paddlers, volunteers, and spectators alike - we're so grateful for your amazing support! Your energy, team spirit, and fundraising efforts make a real difference to the families and patients we care for.

To find out more about our fun-filled events, visit: nihospice.org/events



Proudly sponsored by
Domino's

Christmas at Hospice: Creating Special Memories for Families



At Northern Ireland Hospice, Christmas is a time filled with love, laughter and treasured moments. While the season can be emotional for families spending time in our care, it is also a period of joy, warmth and togetherness, offering a chance to make precious memories that last a lifetime.



Across both our Adult and Children's In-Patient Units, the festive spirit truly comes to life thanks to the dedication and creativity of our staff and volunteers. From twinkling decorations and festive music to special visits from familiar faces, every detail is designed to bring comfort and happiness to patients and their families.



Our Children's Hospice is always full of excitement in the run-up to Christmas. Rooms are transformed with colourful lights and handmade decorations, while families enjoy festive arts and crafts, story time sessions and plenty of visits from Santa and his friends. Every moment is planned to create joy and lasting memories for children and their loved ones.



In our Adult Hospice, the season is one of warmth and reflection. Volunteers and staff work together to make the wards feel like home, with carol singing, delicious festive treats and creative workshops that give patients the opportunity to make gifts and decorations for loved ones. This year, the magic will be even



more special as real reindeer visit the Hospice grounds, spreading smiles and Christmas cheer to everyone they meet.



Every Christmas, the Hospice family goes above and beyond to ensure that those in our care feel surrounded by love. Whether it is a kind word, a shared laugh or the sparkle of fairy lights, these small gestures create an atmosphere of peace and joy that captures the true spirit of the season.



Life at Hospice is about compassion and care all year round, but at Christmas that care shines even brighter. It is a time when our Hospice community, staff, volunteers, families and supporters come together to celebrate life, love and the enduring magic of Christmas.



ONE BIG WALK

A Challenge with Heart



Our first ever One Big Walk took place at Stormont on 16th August in glorious sunshine, and what an incredible day it was! Hundreds of walkers, volunteers, and supporters came together to celebrate the spirit of community and raise vital funds for Hospice care.

From creative costumes to smiling faces, the energy and enthusiasm on the day made it truly unforgettable. A

heartfelt thank you to everyone who took part, volunteered, or cheered from the sidelines - you helped make this event such a success!

We are already looking forward to One Big Walk 2026 and can't wait to see even more of our Hospice community join us next year. Together, we are walking towards a brighter future for Hospice care across Northern Ireland.



Craig Gilroy joins Team Hospice!



Meet our amazing new Children's Hospice Ambassador – former Ulster and Ireland rugby star, Craig Gilroy!

Craig is already proving an invaluable – and busy! – member of the team. First, he received a guided tour of Horizon House from Grace Stewart, Head of Children's Hospice Services, to see the passion and care first-hand; before jumping in a boat to row in our Dragon Boat Race – and also showing his competitive streak by winning the rowing machine challenge! Next, Craig returned to East Belfast, the scene of his sporting triumphs, to officially open Hospice's newest shop, on the Cregagh Road.

Speaking about his new role, Craig said: "Children's Hospice is nothing short of incredible and I'm honoured to stand beside this amazing charity. Becoming a dad a couple of years ago changed my entire perspective and after taking part in Hospice Hockey, I knew that I wanted to do more."

Craig's genuine compassion, personal connection as a young parent, and



Grace Stewart, Head of Children's Hospice Services, with Craig.

his public profile will increase public understanding of children's palliative care needs and help generate vital funds to ensure continued support for families.



Jamie Close; Emma McManus, Children's Hospice Care Team Manager; and Craig.

Volunteering with Hospice Support Groups



Our Hospice Support Groups across Northern Ireland are made up of remarkable volunteers, each with a personal connection to our work. These groups lie at the heart of our community, raising awareness of our specialist palliative care services and generating vital funds to support families when they need us most.

What is a Support Group? Each group is independently organised with its own constitution yet remains firmly part of the NI Hospice family. Members plan and run fundraising events throughout the year, bringing people together in their local communities to make a real difference.

The festive season is always a busy time for our Support Groups,

as volunteers organise activities and events that spread joy while supporting families in need. We have Support Groups in Andersonstown, Ballycastle, Ballymena, Coleraine, County Down and Larne, all making a meaningful impact in their local areas.

We are particularly keen to welcome new volunteers to join our groups. Whether you can offer a few hours to help at events, share your skills, or support our fundraising efforts, joining a Support Group is a meaningful way to make a difference, meet new people and be part of something truly special this Christmas.

Could this be your year to volunteer? To find out more and get involved today contact fundraising@nihospice.org.



Thank you to **Michelle and the Mournes Alpaca family** (pictured right), for their wonderful donation raised through fundraising at their beautiful farm.



Thank you to **Paddy and Sinead Byrne** (pictured above), for their incredible £20,000 donation to the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice, raised by **Team Tiernan** through the 12-hour One Big Walk in memory of their son **Tiernan**.



Thank you to **David and Joan Crawford** (pictured right), for their incredible £27,143.28 donation from the proceeds of David's books *"Stanley Woods: The World's First Motorcycle Superstar and Italy and the Ulster."*

Thank you to the **Elephant Rock Hotel, Portrush** (pictured left), for their £4,850 donation to the Northern Ireland Hospice from the **Rêverie Charity Fashion Show**.



THANK YOU

Here are just some of our amazing supporters who raised funds in support of Northern Ireland Hospice and Children's Hospice.

Well done and thank you to everyone involved!

Thank you to **Chris, Gareth, Glenn, and Nathan** from **Wrightbus** (pictured left), for donating £2,440 to the NI Children's Hospice after walking from **Galgorm to Belfast City Hall**.



Thank you to **Jack Reid Cars** (pictured right), for raising £3,974.33 for the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice, with thanks to everyone who donated.



Thank you to the **extended McGowan family** (pictured right), for their wonderful **Golf Day** in memory of **Niamh and Conor**, creating a lasting legacy in their name.

Thank you to **Eunan McAleese and Fiona O'Regan** (pictured right), for their £7,646.47 donation to the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice, raised through the **Cork Marathon** in support of the **McCloy family** and **#TeamClaragh**.



Thank you to **Riley, Grace, Maci, and Ella** for raising £1,400 for the NI Children's Hospice in memory of their **brother George** through their fantastic fundraising efforts.



Thank you to **Elaine Moore's family and friends** (pictured left), for raising £3,778.34 for the Northern Ireland Hospice through **four events**, including **two golf days** and the **Mournes Seven Sevens challenge** and a night in **The Bureau Bar** in loving memory of **Elaine**.



A huge thank you to **Karon and family** (pictured left), in their fantastic efforts in memory of **Gerard Dargan**. Well done to everyone involved!



A big thank you to **Amber River NI** (pictured above), for raising an amazing **£634** at their recent **coffee morning** in support of Northern Ireland Hospice!

If your workplace is interested in hosting a fun, team-building fundraiser like this, get in touch. We'd love to hear from you.



A huge thank you to the amazing teams from **Ballyprint, Impro Printing, and Perfect Day Printing** (pictured left), who took on a **15,000 ft skydive** in memory of their colleague **Johnny Haywood** - raising an incredible **£17,500** for Northern Ireland Hospice.

A huge thank you to everyone at **DAERA MFD** (pictured right), who recently hosted a **coffee morning** in support of Northern Ireland Children's Hospice, raising an incredible **£1,420.77**.



We are proud to be one of the four charities chosen by **Progressive Building Society** (pictured left), who have announced a landmark **£80,000** commitment to support local communities across Northern Ireland. Thank you for your incredible support.



A huge thank you to **La Mon Hotel** (pictured right), for their incredible support of our **Dragon Boat Race!** Together, they raised a fantastic **£1,999.68** for Northern Ireland Hospice.



Thank you to **Titanic Quarter and Belfast Harbour** (pictured right), for raising an incredible **£4,659** for NI Hospice through events like a **car wash, coffee morning, and our Dragon Boat Race!**

A huge thank you to **Domino's** (pictured below), for **sponsoring our much-loved Dragon Boat Race** and donating an incredible **£10,000** to Northern Ireland Hospice and Children's Hospice!



Thank you to our amazing **Charity of the Year** partners, **Dunbia Group** (pictured left), for raising an incredible **£1,000** through their **coffee morning and book sale** in support of Northern Ireland Hospice!



A huge thank you to **Barclays** (pictured left), for their generous support, raising **£2,750** to help Northern Ireland Hospice continue providing vital care across Northern Ireland!



New Cregagh Road Shop Brings Community Together

HospiceShap



We were absolutely delighted to open a brand-new charity shop on Cregagh Road, bringing a fresh opportunity for the East Belfast community to come together in support of local hospice care.

The shop offers a wide range of quality pre-loved clothing, accessories, homewares, books, and more, perfect for shoppers looking to find sustainable



bargains while supporting a vital local cause. With every purchase, donation, and volunteer hour, residents are helping to fund specialist palliative care for adults and children across Northern Ireland.

Former Ireland and Ulster rugby player Craig Gilroy, recently appointed as a Northern Ireland Children's Hospice Ambassador, officially opened the shop before meeting staff, volunteers, and local shoppers.

The new Cregagh Road Hospice shop is already proving to be a wonderful addition to the area,



bright, welcoming, and beautifully presented, it offers a friendly and enjoyable shopping experience for everyone. The store is quickly becoming a local favourite, where people can find hidden treasures while supporting a cause close to home.

The Cregagh Road Hospice shop is located at **18 Cregagh Road, Belfast BT6 9EP**. Donations of good-quality, pre-loved items are warmly welcomed. To get involved, call **028 9079 3149** or pop in and show your support.

All cards
£3.50
per pack*



**Northern
Ireland
Hospice**

All packs
contain
10 cards*




CHRISTMAS B R O C H U R E



Calendars
from **£3**

nihospice.org/shop

All packs contain 10 cards, unless otherwise stated, excluding Local Scene Cards

nihospice.org    **Head Office, 18 O'Neill Road, Newtownabbey, BT36 6WB**



Northern Ireland Hospice is a Company Limited by guarantee incorporated in Northern Ireland and is a charity recognised by the Inland Revenue.
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